

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

**Subject**

Undergrounding of Existing Overhead Utility Facilities

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**Purpose**

To provide a policy for the orderly and timely conversion of utilities from overhead to underground in the unincorporated area, in cooperation with the utility companies.

**Background**

On September 19, 1967, as a result of their Case No. 8209, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) of the State of California adopted a ruling requiring electric and telephone companies to initiate and participate in an active program to underground utilities in areas of general public benefit.

**Underground Utility Districts**

San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) Rule 20A and Pacific Bell Rule 32A were adopted stating that the utilities will underground their existing overhead distribution facilities at their own expense along public roads and on public lands in areas known as Underground Utility Districts (UUDs). To form a UUD, the governing body of the county in which distribution facilities are located must:

1. Determine, after consulting with the utilities and after holding a public hearing, that such undergrounding is in the general public interest because it meets specific criteria required by the PUC (eliminates heavy concentration of wires, is in an area of high vehicle or pedestrian traffic, or is related to a civic, recreational, or scenic area).
2. Adopted an ordinance creating the UUD requiring that:
  - a. All existing and future overhead facilities will be placed underground.
  - b. Each property owner served will provide trench, conduit, and electric meter panel modifications as necessary to receive service from the underground facilities as soon as they are available.
  - c. The utilities will be authorized to discontinue overhead service to any customer who does not complete the required service conversion.

**Allocations/Costs**

Each year, SDG&E allocates funds for undergrounding among the counties and cities it serves in the same ratio as overhead customers within these jurisdictions bear to the total

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overhead system. Upon the request of a city or county, SDG&E will also pay for the installation of up to 100 feet of each customer's electric service lateral cost out of these allocations. Pacific Bell and cable TV companies underground to the same extent as SDG&E but are not required to allocate funds.

In addition, SDG&E (under Rule 20B) and Pacific Bell (under Rule 32B) will share the cost to underground their overhead facilities with their affected customers under certain conditions. The cost to property owners may be financed through an Assessment District.

**UUD Program**

On July 1, 1968, the Board adopted Ordinance No. 3217 (New Series) to establish regulations and procedures for undergrounding of overhead utility facilities within Underground Utility Districts. The Board authorized an Underground Utilities Advisory Committee to review projects that meet the criteria for undergrounding, to coordinate plans and construction of these projects, and to develop a long range plan for undergrounding in the unincorporated area.

**Policy**

It is the policy of the Board of Supervisors that:

1. An orderly program be maintained for undergrounding existing overhead utility lines in the unincorporated area under the PUC Rules and Regulations.
2. Projects selected for undergrounding shall meet at least one of the following criteria required by the PUC:
  - a. The undergrounding will avoid or eliminate an unusually heavy concentration of overhead distribution facilities.
  - b. The road or right-of-way occupied by the facilities is extensively used by the general public and carries a heavy volume of pedestrian or vehicular traffic.
  - c. The road or right-of-way adjoins or passes through a civic area, public recreation area, or an area of unusual scenic interest to the general public.
3. In developing the program, priority consideration will be given to qualified projects involving:
  - a. County financed improvements of roads, parks, or other facilities that necessitate the relocation or construction of overhead utilities.

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b. Undergrounding of utilities on improved County roads or in the vicinity of existing County facilities.

c. Community landscaping programs.

d. Requests by petition, signed by a majority of the property owners in an area, expressing a willingness to participate in the total cost of the project to the extent of 50 percent of the cost of such work.

e. Requests from civic groups.

4. The cost of the first 100 feet of electric trench and conduit for each service conversion will be paid for by SDG&E under the terms of its Rule 20A.

5. Where projects do not meet the PUC criteria, the Board will assist the conversion under SDG&E Rule 20B and Pacific Bell Rule 32B by establishing underground utility districts. Such conversions may be accomplished under Assessment Act procedures.

**Procedure**

The Underground Utilities Advisory Committee will consist of one member from SDG&E, Pacific Bell, and each affected cable TV company, and two members from the Department of Public Works (the Utility Coordinator and the Chief of Special Districts). The Committee will meet periodically to develop the undergrounding program, to coordinate administration and construction of the various projects, and to make recommendations on specific projects to the Board of Supervisors.

The Department of Public Works will administer underground projects approved under this policy.

**Sunset Date**

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-03.

**Board Action**

5-05-70 (57)

8-11-70 (63)

12-04-84 (18)

3-01-88 (97)

6-29-93 (61)

1-4-94 (3)

11-17-99 (11)

**CAO Reference**

1. Department of Public Works